

The University of Chicago

THE SAAR PLEBISCITE

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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THE SOUTH ATLANTIC QUARTERLY
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THE *OFFICIAL JOURNAL* of the League of Nations in January, 1935, reported as follows the vote which was to show whether, after fifteen years of international government, the Saar Territory chose to maintain League control, to become French, or to return to the country from which the Versailles Treaty had separated it:

In accordance with the Plebiscite Regulations, the voting operations opened on Sunday, January 13th, 1935, at 7:30 a.m.; they passed off in perfect calm and without any noteworthy incident. From a very early hour, the public flocked to the offices in very large numbers in spite of the inclement weather and the melting snow through which the voters had to make their way. The public displayed admirable discipline, patience and dignity. It was easy to see that they realized the importance of the decision and the solemnity of the occasion.

The ballot boxes, said the report, were collected from the electoral bureaus by army or police lorries and carried to the headquarters of voting districts and then to the nearest railway stations, whence they were forwarded to Saarbruck by special trains and conveyed to the Wartburg Hall. Those from the electoral bureaus in the town of Saarbruck were taken by the police. All the ballot boxes except those for the city of Saarbruck were conveyed from the headquarters of the voting division to the Wartburg Hall under military escort throughout. The ballot boxes were accompanied on their journey by a neutral representative of the Plebiscite Commission and two witnesses appointed by the opposing parties. Each ballot box was accompanied from the beginning to the end of its journey by a transport certificate signed by the representative of the commission and the above-mentioned witnesses. The ballot boxes were taken over at the Wartburg Hall by officials of the commission, who signed records of receipt.

According to the report, the counting of the votes began at 5:00 P.M., Monday, January 14, 1935, and was carried out under the direct and exclusive supervision of the commission. The count-

ing was done by three hundred neutral tellers. Decisions concerning the validity of the electoral certificates which each voter was required to have in order to prove his right to cast a ballot were made by the commission. The officials were forbidden to leave Wartburg Hall during the operations. Seats were reserved for representatives of the Saar, France, Germany, and the press. On Tuesday, January 15, between 6:00 and 7:00 A.M., the results of the plebiscite were communicated by telephone to the secretariat of the League of Nations. At a quarter past eight the results were announced in the Wartburg Hall.

This official report, signed by the Swedish member of the Plebiscite Commission (who the well-known writer, Elizabeth Wiskemann, said wanted "to get the whole business over as quickly and quietly as possible") omitted significant facts. Among these was the impression of the Saarlanders that at the last minute the League of Nations had unwillingly betrayed the cause of democracy. To quote Miss Wiskemann again:

One side had all the wireless stations of Germany at its disposal; the other, occasionally driven by desperation to the Strasbourg microphone, was handling a boomerang, for the "Tools of France" cry was as injurious as silence. The Plebiscite Commission begged the Germans to give up the wireless for the last few days with so little success that on the plebiscite day the Stuttgart Station unblushingly broadcast that all the *status quo* leaders had fled in comfort, leaving "vote for Germany" instructions for their followers. It is really obvious that the Plebiscite Commission could have very easily silenced the German stations by declaring that the League would regard further action as invalidating the result. In the same way the interference of the German (Catholic) Bishops, which was strikingly different from the perfectly neutral attitude of the Pope, might have been prevented. Under episcopal pressure, a number of priests preached their first pro-German sermons on the morning of January 13th.

On the Sunday before the plebiscite, according to the same writer, a *status quo* vote of over 125,000 seemed sure.

In the week that followed, the German Front in the Saar carried out such a rapid and decisive exploitation of the complacency of the Plebiscite Commission and of all the anomalies of the situation, as, in effect, to hold the plebiscite themselves. . . . In the consequent confusion Henessy [chief of the Saar police during the plebiscite] apparently allowed things to happen

without the knowledge of the ministers (Knox and Heimburger) to whom he was responsible. The test day was the day upon which the first big batch of American voters [former Saarlanders] arrived. Large Nazi crowds gathered at the station, which rapidly became the scene of an unlawful political demonstration; the mounted police, who could easily have dispersed the crowd without brutality, according to an expert with whom I spoke, looked on in acquiescence. The Anti-Nazis protested, and the German Front, admonished by the authorities, issued one of those "glorious sacrifice" appeals to its followers to desist.

National Socialist youths of the *Ordnungsdienst* now appeared at the station in the character of auxiliary police with German Front armlets and promptly took charge of the incoming voters and journalists. Young men sent by the United Front with armlets of their own to welcome arrivals were ordered by the police to wear those armlets inside out to prevent danger to the public peace. On Saturday night, the eve of the plebiscite, the cadre of reliable police was scattered; loyal supporters of the Geneva regime were sent on leave. The Plebiscite Commission asked the fire brigades of the local authorities, well known to be pro-National Socialist, to police the polling stations. The Red Cross officials who helped at the polling stations were also nominees of National Socialists. "Everywhere the great *Reichspost* buses transported voters with the aid of German Front officials and endless Hitler salutes; already the opposition seemed to have vanished." Concentration-camp threats were distributed. German Front officials went around demanding the voters' qualification papers; they took down all the particulars they saw and hinted that it would in consequence be possible to trace each person's electoral certificate.

Many of these facts, reported by Miss Wiskemann (*Contemporary Review*, CXLVII, 297 ff.), were confirmed by other observers. Prince Hubertus zu Loewenstein, a German exile who drove on the day of the plebiscite from village to village, from polling place to polling place, saw that *Ordnungsdienst* men—S.A. in almost full uniform—were everywhere and that *status quo* men, with leaflets, were pushed aside or driven off by the new auxiliary police. Another reliable and competent observer, a native of the Saar who wishes to remain anonymous, stressed the "decisive fact that in the last days . . . before the vote, the Nazis succeeded in creat-

ing in the Saar Territory an atmosphere which made people believe in an overwhelming victory of the Nazis. The plebiscite authorities granted their passive assistance by tolerating this."

The psychological climate of the plebiscite was undoubtedly of great importance. That the secrecy of the vote was guaranteed during the plebiscite was a matter of doubt to many who, because of their fear, had joined the German Front; the same fear may have induced them to vote as they did. Most unfortunate was the way in which the international police force that the League had sent was used and abused. On the one hand, there were not enough men to send even a single armed sentry to each of the 862 polling stations; on the other, the German Front took good care to be extraordinarily polite to the officers of the English Brigade of Guards. "These officers," said Miss Wiskemann, "could soon tell one all about the common Nordic blood of England and Germany, and how the Nazis were good, patriotic, soldierly chaps and their opponents just a few dirty Bolshies." The correspondent of the *London Times*, after a remark on the secrecy of the Saar vote, concluded (January 14, 1935): "Few who have followed the plebiscite campaign and the pressure exerted from various quarters on the voters are ready to declare that two other conditions—that the vote should be uninfluenced and that it should be trustworthy—have been fulfilled." That the supporters of the *status quo* considered the plebiscite unfair was clearly revealed in a report sent on the day of the vote by the Associated Press from Saarbruck:

The United Front in the Saar, anti-Nazi organization opposing reunion with Germany, tonight assailed today's plebiscite to determine the territory's future status.

Max Braun, leader of this opposition, said he would protest to the League of Nations Council that the plebiscite was neither "free, uninfluenced nor secret." He termed the vote "the worst pseudo-democratic election ever held, outside of Germany's farces."

"Responsible quarters," he said, "failed miserably to live up to their guarantees for a free election." He arraigned the Red Cross nurses who had aided invalids in making their ballots as "tools of Hitler," and charged the police with having named members of three Hitlerite organizations to help run the plebiscite. . . .

"The impression was created," said Herr Braun, "that the Saar already

is under Nazi rule. Many voters came to me during the day and asked me what use there was in continuing the fight."

Similar complaints were made by Jean Revire, founder of the Association Française de la Sarre. This eminent protector of the francophile Saarlanders noticed (*Revue Hebdomadaire*, XLIV, Vol. II, 11), among other suspicious facts, that the National Socialists knew the result of the vote as early as Monday at 6:00 P.M.—that is, one hour after the counting started. "As a hundred journalists can testify, it was easy to get information about the result on Monday after 11:00 P.M. or midnight, while the commission had solemnly affirmed that nobody would know anything before the official proclamation." In Revire's opinion, there was some last-minute treason. "The main fact," he added, "the undeniable fact, is that the plebiscite was not free, that the treaty has been violated, and that the League of Nations has permitted it to be violated." Very different was the reaction of the American expert, Sarah Wambaugh, who later wrote (*The Saar Plebiscite*, Cambridge, Mass.: 1940):

The assertion by Max Braun shortly after the vote that many ballots were falsified was no doubt due to a failure to understand that the ballots provided for the preliminary day of voting [for several categories of voters] were slightly different from those used on the thirteenth. The protest was never made to the Plebiscite Commission or to the League, and indeed there was no possible ground for such assertion.

Miss Wambaugh conceded that "the Saar plebiscite was not perfect"; that the authorities failed "to secure the representation of both sides on each registration board"; and that "of the moral 'terror' called by Anglo-Saxons 'fear', there was a very great deal." Nevertheless, she stated, "That the *status quo* leaders made no formal protest to the League Council is proof that the result was unanswerable."

According to the result of the voting as officially announced, 539,541 names were inscribed on the voting register. Of the 528,105 votes cast, 46,613 voted for the *status quo*; 2,124, for France; 477,119, for union with Germany; 905 ballots were invalid; 1,292, blank. These figures on the surface seem to demonstrate an overwhelming victory of Germany.

Some of the details, however, are noteworthy. Although 528,053

persons participated officially in the plebiscite, the total officially announced was 528,105. The number of votes cast in certain districts was surprising. In the district of Boeckweiler, of 391 persons registered for the vote, 391 actually voted. At Webenheim, 751 registered, and 751 voted. At Ormesheim, 956 registered, and 956 voted. At Brenschelbach only one person of those registered failed to vote; the same was true of Wolfersheim and Rubenheim, while at Woerschweiler and at Bebelshheim two voters dropped out. At Saarwellingen, of 6,416 voters registered, 6,411 voted. Thus, of these 11,518 Saarlanders only twelve failed to vote. Even under normal conditions this would have been an extremely high proportion of participation; but conditions in the Saar were far from normal. Some 80,000 voters cast their ballots in a location other than the one in which they were living, and some 55,000 nonresident voters had to be transported to the polling places. Moreover, on the day of the plebiscite several inches of snow and slush covered the roads, in a region where roads were poor and automobiles rare. Weather on that day was so bad that even a professional British soldier called it "atrocious." On the other hand, there were far more absentees at Saarbruck, where traffic was easy (3,746 out of 88,596 voters). Furthermore, a note appended to the official list of the number of persons on the voting register read: "There may be a few insignificant inaccuracies in the figures in this column owing to the fact that, as the names of persons had to be entered or cancelled at the last moment, it was materially impossible to ascertain all the figures of the voters registered." This meant that the cases in which the number of registered voters and actual voters was identical were virtually electoral miracles.

Twenty-one hours elapsed between the closing of the polls and the beginning of the counting. The ballot boxes were taken in trucks from the polling stations to the district headquarters, and thence to the nearest railway station. Special trains brought the boxes to Saarbruck. Why, then, since it took only half an hour to cross the whole Saar Territory in an express train, did the counting start at 5:00 P.M. and not 5:00 A.M.? Another striking fact was that the Franco-German Rome agreements of December 5, 1934, and the diplomatic activities connected therewith were concerned almost exclusively with the union of the Saar with Germany. Furthermore,

the Rome negotiations were accompanied by a visible decrease of political tension. Did the National Socialists suddenly become more tractable because assured of success? Could they have been sure with a fair vote? Their record and that of Pierre Laval may be cited to support the assumption that some sort of deal was made. If such men as these had decided that the Saar should become German, presumably they would not have hesitated to tamper with a vote in whose necessity they did not believe. On this hypothesis it seems possible to explain the official result of the plebiscite.

Yet no documentary evidence has come to light to support this hypothesis. André Simone in his book, *Paccuse* (1940), stated that on December 2, 1934, the German diplomat Joachim Von Ribbentrop, was received by the French Foreign Minister, Pierre Laval. Their conversation was cloaked in deep secrecy. When Laval bade his visitor goodbye, "an arrangement had been reached guaranteeing Hitler a success in the forthcoming plebiscite in the Saar." Simone continued:

A member of the League Commission in Saarbrücken told me at the end of November 1934 that an agreement had been reached in principle. A declaration would be made at the beginning of January 1935 that the Saar plebiscite would be held after an additional ten years.

This statement never saw the light of day. In the course of von Ribbentrop's visit, Laval made a solemn promise that no such declaration would be forthcoming from the League of Nations. In exchange he received a renewed affirmation from Hitler that, after the settlement of the Saar question, Germany would have no territorial claims on France. Laval obtained the support of Marshal Pétain for his Saar policy. The Marshal expressed himself as strongly against any repetition of the Saar plebiscite. Pétain asserted that he would not permit the Saar to become another Alsace-Lorraine. When Laval informed the Cabinet about his conversation with von Ribbentrop, he was opposed by only two Ministers, Georges Mandel and Edouard Herriot.

But Simone adduced no documentary evidence. Nor was there any to confirm other accusations of foul play. The leaders of the United Front who informed an Associated Press correspondent and the League that "15 per cent of the ballot cast in the plebiscite" had been "forged by German Front workers" were likewise unable to

substantiate their charge. An inspection of the ballots was impossible, because they had been "taken to Geneva and there destroyed."

Dr. Schueller, a correspondent of the Havas Agency, gave important testimony to which so far little attention has been paid. He went to the Wartburg Hall while the ballots were kept in its basement and was admitted without any special authorization. When he wanted to leave, however, he found that the doors by which he had entered were closed. He approached the person in charge, a well-known National Socialist by the name of Eichkamp, who with considerable embarrassment explained to Schueller that the doors had been closed because it was feared something might be published about the possibility of entering the heavily guarded building. To reach a way out, the correspondent was taken through the basement where the heating plant was located. The ballot boxes, which had been made by a National Socialist, were in a cellar next door. Eichkamp showed Schueller a little door leading out and instructed him that if he would say "Good day" to the sentries and walk straight on, nothing would happen, which proved to be the case. Finally, Henry Torrès, Laval's biographer, refers to "mysterious revelations" with which Germany threatened Laval "in sibylline terms." These, however, are merely clues for future research.

The actual counting of the votes was apparently devoid of irregularities. "I was on one of the counting boards and went through the whole count in various parts of the hall all through the night after the voting," testified Professor James K. Pollock of the University of Michigan, "and I heard and saw nothing which could raise the least breath of suspicion." The fact remains, nevertheless, that the official figures of the result were suspicious; that the official reports concerning the plebiscite were not complete; that the freedom of the vote was open to question; that, in the eyes of some observers, there was suspicion as to the authenticity of the official result; and that during the eighteen hours in which the urns were lying in the cellar manipulation of the ballots was not impossible. Let us add that at one time the German Front, accusing the refugees, suggested, according to Miss Wambaugh, that there was "too much danger of theft or of substitution of false ballot boxes."

II

It would be one-sided to reduce this historical problem to the question of the genuineness of the vote. What mattered was the way in which the Great Powers interpreted the plebiscite, faked or genuine.

According to a message sent at the time from Geneva by Clarence K. Streit (*New York Times*, January 16, 1934):

The fact that Germany won by a majority greatly easing the council's task is generally welcomed, notably by M. Laval, Mr. Eden, Foreign Minister Eduard Benes of Czechoslovakia and League officials as allowing an easy, definite and clearcut removal of this source of European trouble. There is, however, widespread disappointment expressed at the smallness of the status quo vote, and considerable fear that the huge Hitler majority may make Germany harder to deal with.

On January 17, 1935, the Italian representative in the League council, Baron Pompeo Aloisi, presented a report to that body, pointing out that in all the electoral subdivisions the population of the Saar had decided by a majority in favor of union with Germany. He asked the council to take cognizance of this fact and to fix March 1, 1935, as the date for the re-establishment of German rule over the territory. With the acceptance of Aloisi's proposal at the close of the meeting, the Saar Territory virtually ceased to exist.

Speaking next, Laval showed agreement with Aloisi's observations. The plebiscite had been held, the vote was clear, and the will expressed by it categorical. The people of the Saar had made their choice freely. The council had to decide for the reunion of the Saar with Germany. France, by her willingness to abide by the results of the plebiscite, had demonstrated her loyalty to the principle that treaties must be respected. France and the League had once again served the cause of peace. The questions still to be solved were manifold and complicated, but previous negotiations would facilitate their settlement. Having paid this compliment to himself, Laval addressed France's new partner:

The Head of the Government of the Reich had two days previously made an appeal to the people of the Saar and urged that there should be no blot marring their return to the German motherland and that they should observe the strictest discipline. In using that language, Chancellor Hitler

had desired . . . to indicate his wish to avert any reprisals against those who had made use of the freedom of opinion and the freedom of vote conferred on them by the Treaty.

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In hailing the return of the Saar to Germany, Chancellor Hitler had once again affirmed his desire for peace. The event of January 13th was, he had announced, a decisive step on the road towards the reconciliation of the peoples, and the German Reich had no territorial claim against France. . . .

The *rapprochement* of the two countries was in fact one of the essential conditions for the effective guarantee of peace in Europe. France was pacific. She pursued no selfish aim. She did not wish to cast the slightest reflection on the legitimate concern that a great people was bound to feel for its national dignity, but history showed her that she must live in security. The other nations had the same right, and, in the search for one of the factors of that security, no Government must hesitate to take its share in the conclusion of pacts the precise object of which was to ensure the essential reciprocal guarantees to each of the signatory countries. Only the previous day, the French Ambassador in Berlin had handed the Government of the Reich a note on the Eastern Pact, the negotiation of which was being continued. France would shortly consider what concrete form could be given to the Rome Agreements, in order that their benefits might be extended to all the countries concerned.

The liquidation of the Saar Territory was, according to this interpretation, the first link in a new chain of pacts which would grant the necessary concessions and yet remain "within the framework of the institution of Geneva."

That Aloisi and Laval should glorify this new order was natural; but what would the British democracy and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics say? Eden was glad, on behalf of his government, to support the adoption of Aloisi's report. He believed that its terms would be received "with general satisfaction by all." He was sure that "it was not too much to hope that the adoption of the report would in itself prove an aid to international understanding," and that "it was in that helpfully constructive spirit that the moving speech to which the Council had just listened had been made." Litvinov first talked in a similar vein:

History had decided that there should be a test as to the nationality of the Saar population; and that test, which had taken place on the 13th of the

present month, had yielded results which put an end to all doubts, if any had existed, as to the nationality of the Saar Territory. It could not be expected of the Council of the League, in view of the results of that test, that it should enter into the question why and from what motives the Saar people had voted. If, as some people believed, the voters had entertained certain special considerations running counter to their national aspirations, the fact that these considerations had been brushed aside could only heighten the importance of the vote from a purely national point of view. The great majority of the Saar people had indicated that they wished to remain German and to share in every respect the fate of their fellow-countrymen. The Council had only to bow before such a decision and it should be glad to congratulate the German people on the return to its bosom of its sons of the Saar.

The Russian diplomat also declared that the solution of the Saar problem "removed one of the many stumbling-blocks on the road to general peace." However, this kowtow before the *fait accompli* was followed by what was in reality a deadly criticism of Laval's policy:

It must be acknowledged that peace was not scattered about—lying in pieces in various parts of the globe or of Europe, and that it was sufficient to pick up some pieces of it—that it was impossible to reach peace by side-tracks or private ways, open to some and closed to other countries. Peace was indivisible, and all paths to it led to one great highway, which should be taken by all countries. It must also be acknowledged that there was no security in a country's own peace if peace were not secured at the same time to its neighbors, near and far. Not only must they themselves be conscious of this fact, but they must also make it clear to all those who, while speaking at some time of peace, showed and tried to impose on other peoples, quite different and, he would say, distorted, ideas of peace. They should also be clear and make it clear to other people that, at the present time, peace could not be secured by personal statements and declarations of one statesman or another. They would be doing ill service to the cause of peace were they to allow themselves to be soothed by such pacifist declarations. At the present time, peace must be organized and could only be the result of collective efforts and collective guarantees.

This most explicit statement of Russia's general viewpoint on bilateral pacts was somewhat softened by Litvinov's concluding phrase: "If, as he hoped, the event of January 13th, which had taken place in full conformity with international undertakings, and with the full collaboration of an international organization, was destined to help

the ideas which he had outlined to penetrate into the conscience of all peoples, of all statesmen, then it might be said that the Council was, at its present meeting, adopting a decision of great historical significance."

The Great Powers had sealed the document which surrendered the Saar to Hitlerite Germany; some did so reluctantly, some without much comment, some enthusiastically. The smaller countries—Poland, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, Turkey—were in the latter category. The Danish representative expressed the hope that "the satisfactory solution of the problem would open up the way to a general reconciliation between the States which had been opponents during the war, a reconciliation which was so earnestly desired in all countries, and which alone could give all the nations of Europe, including those which stood outside the big political groups, that feeling of security which was of primary importance to the moral and economic well-being of the nations." The Czechoslovakian member of the council welcomed the Saar settlement as proof that Europe was still capable of defending its civilization. The League had shown that it had never carried caution to the point of weakness, or shrewdness to the point of encouraging and assisting despotism and violence. "The Czechoslovak Government was glad to note that the experience gained in the past was a sure pledge of the future." None of these delegates of democratic or conservative countries seemed to be disturbed by the fact that Hitler, the champion of revolutionary territorial changes, agreed with them in regarding the Saar settlement as "a good omen for the whole of Europe."

The attitude of the Geneva diplomats was shared by many other people. "On returning to England," wrote Miss Wiskemann, "I found that everyone was accepting the ninety per cent vote for Germany as a perfectly genuine outburst of patriotism." The *London Star* published a cartoon showing Marianne as a patient of the dentist Hitler, who had just extracted her tooth, the Saar, a painless extraction, which caused Marianne to smile: "I hardly felt it." A Paris periodical exclaimed:

A result foreseen by the *Revue des Vivants* for more than a year! Parisians, however, seem surprised, and some German newspapers speak of a defeat for France. Thank God! The policy pursued by M. Laval does not permit a similar interpretation! Where do those who predicted

a strong opposition minority gather their information, and when will those who make public opinion in France consent to see Germany with eyes other than those of the *émigrés*?

Jack Fischer cabled from Saarbruck to the *New York Nation*: "The plebiscite was absolutely fair and peaceful despite extreme Nazi moral pressure. Ninety-seven per cent of the eligible voters balloted—the most complete expression of public opinion on record." Cedric Fowler, in an interesting story on "The First World Army," said (*New Outlook*, CLXV, 21): "Though it was the center of an international problem of the utmost significance to world peace, the Plebiscite was conducted more quietly and more honestly than most American municipal elections." The *New Republic*, which had previously characterized the Rome agreement as "the cynical merchandising of the Saar between France and Germany," now not only accepted the result of the plebiscite, but even explained: "It is significant that in the mining and industrial towns the pro-Hitler vote ran the heaviest."

Although the list of uncritical comments could be extended indefinitely, only one more example will be given—the opinion of the American technical adviser, deputy member of the Plebiscite Commission, and authoritative historian of the Saar Territory, Miss Sarah Wambaugh. Miss Wambaugh's account of the Saar plebiscite appeared on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the French Revolution. While fortuitous, Miss Wambaugh explained in her preface, this was singularly fitting. The early leaders of the Revolution first gave formal expression to the doctrine of self-determination as a means of ending conquest, and first attempted to settle questions of national sovereignty by the device of the plebiscite. Miss Wambaugh hastened to say that she did not think much of the technique they used:

The plebiscites of the Revolution were primitive affairs, lacking in every safeguard which modern political science requires of a free and fair vote. In our own time we have seen such votes, accompanied by pressure and intimidation, used by dictators in an effort to impress democracies. The effort has been vain. In the one hundred and fifty years since the first plebiscite regarding sovereignty the technique of the fair and sincere plebiscite, used not to "ratify" a *fait accompli* but to ascertain the popular will, has undergone a rapid evolution toward perfection. To contrast the

voting of Avignon in 1791 with that of the Saar in 1935 should give some reassurance as to the capacity of mankind to perfect other devices fashioned by our forefathers to end other abuses.

Turning to her immediate subject, Miss Wambaugh continued:

A study of the Saar plebiscite is of first importance not only because it has settled what it is hoped is the last frontier dispute between France and Germany, and so has removed one of the most threatening dangers to European peace, but because it marks the highest point yet attained by the technique of the international plebiscite. The last of the plebiscites provided in the treaties of peace ending the World War, it was the first held by the League of Nations. It marked also the first occasion on which the League made use of international contingents as a police force. It is not for nothing that it was the first international plebiscite after which there was no protest from either side.

According to Miss Wambaugh, the League administered the vote "in a manner so impartial and scientific as to wipe the Saar problem, which had threatened to lead the Continent into a war, off the international docket."

The author of these remarks was familiar with conditions in the Saar. In 1920 she had been attached to the League secretariat for six months as expert adviser on the administration of the Saar Territory. During the ensuing years she made four visits to the area. For seven months she resided in Saarbruck. Yet she found it possible to give a rosy picture of the plebiscite.

To grasp the meaning of these utterances is to understand one of the secrets of National Socialist success. Hitler's propagandists forced even their natural adversaries to accept, to some extent, National Socialist ideology and to rationalize their defeats as victories. J. Fred Rippy, in one of his studies of American imperialism, designated a certain type of euphemism as "onomantithesis," which consists in calling a thing or a characteristic, particularly if it be unpleasant, not by its ordinary name but by its opposite." People all over the world joined Hitler in labeling the Saar plebiscite an "act of equality and justice." This onomantithesis was more revealing than any official report, any diplomatic discussion, any analysis by experts.

The Russians, when they did not feel under an obligation to bow

before the *fait accompli*, spoke the truth. As quoted in the New York Times (January 17, 1935), "Both Izvestia and Pravda cited reports published in the press of the outside world of Fascist propaganda and repression in the Saar as proofs that the plebiscite was not an expression of the free will of the people." It should be added, however, that, even if there had been no terror or manipulation and if there had been a totally fair vote and count, the *status quo* group would have had no chance to win unless the Great Powers had put all their resources at its disposal, which might have meant war with Germany.

III

The council resolution of January 17, 1935, instructed the League's Saar committee "to decide, in consultation with the French Government, the German Government and the Governing Commission of the Saar Territory, upon the arrangements necessary for the change of regime in the Territory and upon the manner in which the undertakings mentioned above shall be carried out." The most important of these arrangements, sometimes erroneously presented as conditions imposed on Germany, concerned the demilitarization of the Saar Area.

In the course of the negotiations in connection with the plebiscite the French delegation handed Aloisi an *aide-memoire* dealing with the demilitarization of the territory. Although he did not feel that the question came within the Saar committee's province, Aloisi transmitted the *aide-memoire* to the German delegation, asking it to let him know what action the Reich government would be prepared to take in the matter. Through the German consul at Geneva, Aloisi was informed orally that "the German Government has never disputed, and still agrees, that the Saar Territory forms part of the demilitarized zone provided for by the Treaty." Subsequently, the two parties most immediately concerned agreed that the details of the execution of this undertaking should be settled directly between the French and the German governments.

On February 28, 1935, the German ambassador in Paris transmitted to the French minister of foreign affairs the following communication:

The Saar Territory is included in the area covered by Articles 42 and

43 of the Treaty of Versailles: it therefore follows that the provisions applicable to that area will also apply to the Saar Territory after its return to Germany.

The German Government desires more particularly to specify the following points:

I. Police.—The normal strength of the police force of all categories stationed in the Saar Territory after its return to Germany will, generally speaking, correspond to the normal strength of the police forces which were assigned to it and which comprised approximately 1,500 police officers of all categories. . . .

II.—To the four air-ports already provided for in the demilitarized area will be added one air-port at Saarbruck. . . .

A landing-ground will be provided for at Saarlouis having the characteristics of landing-grounds for civil aviation.

In answering this letter, Laval declared that “as regards the presence at any time in the Sarr Territory, henceforth demilitarized, of S.A., S.S. [brown shirts and black shirts] or compulsory labour service formations, the French Government, having regard to certain of the characteristics of the above-mentioned formations, feels compelled to enter the fullest reservations.” Furthermore, Laval warned:

With view to the application of Article 43 of the Treaty prohibiting the Maintenance in the Rhine Area of all Permanent Works for Mobilization, the French Government regards it as a matter of great importance that the railway system and the road system should not be developed except in such ways as may be justified on economic grounds. Such being the case it reserves its right, should any difficulty arise in this respect, to urge its point of view through the diplomatic channel or by recourse to the form of procedure provided for in the treaties in force.

These belated reservations were transmitted by Aloisi to the League council on March 15. One day later Hitler tore up Part Five of the Versailles Treaty, containing the military, naval, and air clauses, by re-establishing universal military service.

Meanwhile, on February 28, George Geoffrey Knox handed over the powers of his Governing Commission to the Saar committee of the council, which came to Saarbruck for this purpose. In order to insure the uninterrupted maintenance of order in the territory, Knox at the same time turned over his police powers to the representative of the German government. On March 1, Aloisi, on behalf of the

League of Nations, solemnly turned over the government of the Saar Territory to Germany, represented for this purpose by "His Excellency Dr. Frick, Minister of the Interior of the Reich," who signed the official record together with the other members of the council committee and its secretary. A document bearing the signature of Aloisi informed the council of this procedure.

In the afternoon of that memorable March 1, Hitler came to Saarbruck and made a speech which was of great significance for subsequent events. In his address Hitler declared that this was a happy day for the whole of Europe. Continuing, he said:

We hope that through this act of conciliatory justice, through this restoration of natural reason, the relations between Germany and France will be finally improved. Just as we wish for peace, so must we hope that the great neighbor will be ready and willing to seek this peace with us. It must be possible that two great peoples should unite their hands, in order that, working together, they may attack those distresses which threaten to bury Europe beneath their weight.

In this way Hitler transformed the solution of the Saar question from a final concession to a new starting point. He opened a road for further claims by continuing:

And this day shall at the same time be a lesson, a lesson for all those who, in ignorance of an eternal historical truth, imagine that through terrorism or violence they can rob a people of its inmost character, a lesson for those who think they can tear away a part of a nation in order to steal from it its soul. Would that all statesmen from this conference might realize one thing—that it is useless to tear asunder peoples by such methods. In the end blood is stronger than all paper documents. What ink wrote will one day be blotted out by blood. This deepest voice will in the end sharply, clearly drown every other sound. Woe to him who can learn nothing from these facts. He will bring distress and trouble upon men without attaining his purpose. He will for the time being bring suffering and distress upon the peoples, but in the end he will be shamefully defeated.

National Socialist Germany gained with the Saar an additional population from which to draw three army corps. In 1936, 7.4 per cent of her total coal production came from the Saar mines. Her steel reserves were increased by a production which in 1933 was equal to about 26 per cent of that of France, 25 per cent of that of

the Reich, and 11 per cent of that of the United States. Roughly three and a half years after his lecture on the role of blood in politics Hitler announced that he would include Saarbruck in his belt of fortifications. A territory in which Laval did not want to see even labor service formations thus became a part of Hitler's "invulnerable armor."

